



Vascular Dialysis Access

Discharge instructions for grafts or fistulas

This handout explains what to expect after having a graft or fistula placed in your arm or leg. It includes what activities are safe to do, problems to look out for, and when to call your doctor if you have any problems with your graft or fistula.

Activities and Precautions

- Some swelling in your arm or leg where the graft or fistula was placed is normal.
- Use your arm normally during the day. To help a fistula grow stronger, you can start arm exercises with a squeeze ball 1 week after surgery.
- Keep your arm above the level of your heart when you lie down to rest or sleep. You can place it on 2 pillows to do this. Elevating your arm in this way will help lessen swelling.
- Do not wear tight clothes, wristwatches, or bracelets over your graft or fistula.
- Do not rest or sleep on your arm that has the graft or fistula. This may block the blood flow to the graft or fistula.
- Avoid keeping the arm or leg with the graft or fistula in a bent position for long periods.
- Do not have your blood pressure checked, blood drawn, or an IV (*intravenous line*) placed in your arm with the graft or fistula for as long as your access site is being used.
- Feel for a *thrill* over the graft or fistula site. A thrill feels like a buzzing or vibration under your skin. This thrill means that the graft or fistula is working. You should feel for a thrill several times a day. We recommend checking for a thrill *at least* every morning when you wake up and every evening before going to bed.
- Do not carry things such as handbags, grocery bags, or children with the arm that has the graft or fistula.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Dialysis Access Center:
206-744-2452

Renal Clinics:

Harborview Medical
Center (HMC):
206-744-8998

University of
Washington Medical
Center (UWMC):
206-598-2844

After hours paging:

HMC: 206-744-3000
UWMC: 206-598-6190



Dialysis Access Center

Harborview Medical Center
Box 359796
325 Ninth Ave. Seattle, WA 98104
206-744-2452

Incision Care

- Keep your dressing (bandage) clean and dry.
- Unless you are told not to, you may remove the dressing 36 hours after your graft or fistula is placed.
- You may shower 36 hours after your procedure. Do not take a bath, soak in a hot tub, or go swimming until your incision is fully healed.
- You may have *Steri-Strips* (thin pieces of white tape) on your incision to keep it closed. These will loosen and fall off in about 7 to 10 days.

Medicines

- Resume your pre-surgery medicines unless you are told not to.
- If your doctor prescribed pain medicine, take it as directed.
- If pain medicine was not prescribed, your doctor will recommend a pain medicine you can buy without a prescription.
- Do not drink alcohol or use machinery while taking pain medicines.

When to Call Your Doctor

Call your doctor if:

- You are bleeding from the graft or fistula. Put pressure on the bleeding site. **If you cannot control the bleeding with pressure, or if the bleeding increases, call 9-1-1.**
- You do not feel a *thrill* or vibration over the graft or fistula. **Call your doctor right away.**
- Your hand on the side of your body where the graft or fistula is feels cold, numb, achy, tingly, or weak.
- You develop a fever or chills.
- Your graft or fistula incision becomes red, warm, or tender, or it begins to drain.
- You have a lot of swelling in the arm or leg where the graft or fistula was placed.

Follow-Up Visit

You should have a follow-up visit in the office 1 to 2 weeks after your procedure.

Your follow-up visit is on _____ at _____
with _____.